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## THE SENTIMENTAL IN AMERICAN HISTORY

THE recent experience of the American people in carrying on a war for sentiment but to find themselves at the end confronted by new and perplexing conditions certainly warrants an examination of the justification of the sentimental as an influence in national policy.

"Sentiment rules the world" is a common saying; but it plays a small part in the commercial world. "Business is business" expresses the impossibility of conducting affairs on lines of sentiment. Whether wisely or not, sentiment also has little weight in determining the higher affiliations of life. Church membership, political complexion, the choice of a college, or the selection of a place of residence is likely to turn on family influence or some material consideration rather than sentiment. In fact some investigators are convinced that fewer unhappy marriages would follow a realization by candidates of the practical side of such relations rather than the sentimental view.

The basic law of society — the survival of the fittest — ignores sentiment. Under that law, society imprisons and exiles contaminating criminals, confines dangerous lunatics, excludes paupers from America, and suspends incorrigible pupils from the schools. Perhaps society may yet restrain the propagation of the vicious. We judge man as an individual according to his environment, his actions, and his possibilities; but in dealing with men in classes, sentiment replaces judgment, impossibilities are expected, and we complain because the days of miracles are past.

People well knew during slavery days that the slave-owner in order to protect his property was obliged to keep the mass of the slaves ignorant; yet no sooner was the negro a free man than we fondly imagined by placing a ballot in his hand he would become an intelligent citizen, capable of performing the highest function within the imagination of the student of political science.

In some miraculous manner, the slow process of evolution was to be overcome by an amendment to the federal constitution.

Having gained nothing by this experience, sentiment again painted the Cuban as a high-class gentleman who needed but a change of administration to make him capable of self-government. Useless to point out that we, the heirs of the ages and the highest type produced by evolution in many centuries, are but fairly succeeding in self-government; futile to show that the Cuban had never had opportunity for self-help. The letters of the American soldiers in Cuban camps first showed the American people as a whole what the newspapers, intent on fostering sentiment, had carefully concealed. Centuries of government for revenue only had not created a high respect for the rights of property in the Cuban mind.

These instances demonstrate the obligation on the framers of American thought—the writer and the teacher of American history—to correct constantly such sentimental refraction and set forth men and measures in their true light. Now that we have proven the attainment of our majority on the field of battle we may surely dare to admit that all Americans are not demi-gods and all American measures Providence-inspired. Sensitiveness should disappear with the boasting of youth. No longer should that writer who dares to point out a mistake in the nation's career fore-doom his work to eternal punishment; no longer should the teacher who replaces sentimental motives by reasonable grievances in studying the choosing-point of a statesman commit professional suicide.

In putting aside the sentimental from the study of a man's career, one should carefully distinguish between self-interest and selfishness. Either may influence a statesman in making a choice of position. But self-interest is a primary law of nature, generous, dependable, praiseworthy; selfishness is unnatural, narrow, and wholly unreliable. Self-interest seeks advancement; selfishness does not scruple to use others for such purpose. Selfishness usually poses as disinterestedness. The disinterested patriot in any cause is likely to be a hypocrite or an agitator who will soon disappear at a tangent through pure centrifugal force. You can

always count upon the man who enters a cause from a grievance. He has been moved personally. Why should we then find it necessary to conceal his grievance in a halo of "disinterested patriotism?"

It detracts not the least from the services of George Washington in the American cause to admit that he chafed under the British administration of the colonies. The military career upon which he entered with such good training and such high hopes brought to him a train of snubs and mortifications simply because he held a colonial instead of a king's commission. His western land was kept closed to the Palatinates because of the tithes of an established church. Under intercolonial jealousy and lack of coöperation, he saw the frontier unprotected and could give the distressed people no "further relief than uncertain promises." If he tried to punish a mutiny at Cumberland, the verdict was set aside because the fort was located outside Virginia. In casting his fame and fortune with the rebels Washington alienated himself from many of his friends, endangered his hard-earned military record, and, although a man of property, associated himself with the enemies of the existing government. It is simply reasonable to search for his motives in his grievances rather than in an empty sentiment.

The separation from the mother country bore even more heavily on Franklin than it did on Washington. Why did he choose the patriot side? An Englishman by taste and habit although born in the colonies, he always spoke of a journey to England as "going home." A residence of over ten years still further endeared England to him. But this sentiment was rapidly overcome in his unwarranted dismissal from his position as deputy postmaster-general for America and by the insults of of Wedderburn. It was natural for him to hope for restoration to favor. It need not diminish our respect for him because he was kept dangling two years in England by suggestions of another appointment—possibly the governorship of Pennsylvania. If continued disappointment and ill-treatment turned Benjamin Franklin to the American side, the historian and the teacher do no violence to his patriotism in saying so.

American writers have tried constantly to refute the charge that James Otis turned anti-administration because his father failed to obtain a judgeship, and that Patrick Henry's words convict him of seeing a greater career as an agitator than a friend of government. We are irritated by the suggestion that Samuel Adams had a moving grievance in the paper-money difficulty which he had inherited from his father, and that John Hancock was lukewarm in the cause until the sloop "Liberty" was seized. We do not wish to have pointed out the letters of John Adams to his wife showing the careful thought he gave to the choosing of sides and the fact that he never committed himself by taking active part in a patriot meeting until eight years after the passage of the stamp act. If the Revolutionary leaders were men who chose their ground carefully and after mature deliberation and because of a personal experience and for a reasonable motive, American sensitiveness should not be unwilling to admit it. In fidelity only can we secure the prime fruits of the study of history—the imitation of the best parts and avoidance of the worst parts of men and measures.

Sentiment demands perfection. It would endow the Constitution-makers with more than human wisdom and ascribe to prescience what was probably due to an accident—"We, the people of the United States." In the protracted slavery struggle, sentiment forbids either side admitting a modicum of wrong or a shadow of inconsistency; and the teacher of North or South who tries to show that the ensuing war was a great mistake which might have been avoided if both sides had not been blinded by passion does so at his peril. How can we claim a united people so long as different text-books on American history are needed for different parts of the land? Sentiment and passion still rule.

Sentiment would carefully avoid reference to Abraham Lincoln overcharging his mileage when a member of Congress as he and others did. It would apologize for him because he wrote letters soliciting votes when he was a candidate for office. It would try in some manner to explain why he contributed to campaign funds as the modern "politician" does. Indeed, there will be found those to insist that the teacher picture Lincoln as

a mighty champion of anti-slavery, fore-ordained and fore-determined to strike the shackles from the slave; as a giant who blew defiant blasts toward the South, refusing to listen to compromise or entreaty. To such sentimentalists the conciliatory message sent by Lincoln to Stephens after his election that "the South will be in no more danger in this respect (slavery) than it was during Washington's administration" fails entirely to show that he was a man of the people, waiting to see what they wanted done and very anxious not to get too far in advance of them.

True historical spirit, the earnest desire to know the exact truth, would demand that we study and paint men as they actually are. "Wart and all" may not make a beautiful portrait, but it is at least honest and trustworthy. Indications are not wanting that the mirage is passing and that the outlook is appearing in truer and broader relations. We are growing more tolerant of the reforms of other nations, more willing to admit that we have points which may be improved. When schoolbook-makers announce a history prepared especially for a section of the United States and to be "submitted for approval," a storm of protest causes the wary mariners to trim sail immediately. When a war conducted on ground of a sentiment is ended, the great American people pause to take reckoning before gathering unto themselves the accustomed fruits of victory.

With such hopeful indications, it may be that rational grounds will gradually supplant the fanciful in national thought and action. With the assistance given by the reasonable writing and teaching of American history we may free ourselves from the charge made by Wendell Phillips that we "read history with our prejudices and not with our eyes."

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